

Testimony on SJR 20
Urging Congressional action on climate change
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Over the last 6 years the National Wildlife Federation, one of the nation's oldest and largest conservation groups, has changed its emphasis to one that addresses the threats posed by a changing climate.

The National Wildlife Federation is the umbrella organization for many state affiliates that represent hunters and anglers in 48 states. We have long experience with the needs of wildlife, especially the kinds of wildlife for which hunters hunt and fishers fish. I graduated from the University of Montana almost 40 years ago and have worked as a wildlife biologist for state agencies and conservation groups since then including 21 years in Alaska.

Climate change appears likely to be the most serious threat to continued life, as we know it, on earth. There is more carbon in the atmosphere now than at any time during the last 650,000 years and it is impossible to correct this before accumulated greenhouse gasses cause the earth to become still warmer.

We see the impacts of this already in Montana with noticeable less snowfall than existed when I was a student. From the journals of Lewis and Clark you can see that they barely made it over the Bitterroots on both their westward and eastward journeys. On their way east they camped out in Kamiah, Idaho for weeks waiting for the snow to melt enough for them to make it back over the Bitterroots to Travelers Rest, near to where I live today. At the same time of year that Lewis and Clark had to trudge through snow up to their waists, we can today walk their same route in shirtsleeves and shorts without finding enough snow to pack a snowball. It has been like that every year but one over the last decade.

The differences between what Lewis and Clark found and what exists today could be an effect of weather rather than climate change. We are seeing the effects of weather this year with heavy snowfall in Colorado and parts of the Midwest and northeast. One can't draw accurate conclusions about whether the climate is changing or not based on weather events observed in isolation. Accurate conclusions about climate trends must be based on observations that are geographically widespread. Such studies are what a few scientists have been doing for decades and many scientists around the world are now doing. The consensus that has developed from these studies should be extremely alarming to all who cherish our lives, economy, and diversity of life on earth.

Twenty years ago I was part of a team that was studying polar bears on the Arctic ice cap on Alaska's north slope. The beauty of that environment on the polar ice and the creatures that live there was something I'll never forget. Now it has become clear that one of the first large mammal sacrifices to mankind's pollution of our atmosphere with greenhouse gases will be the polar bear. The dramatically shrinking polar ice cap is creating distances between the ice flows

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and between the arctic ice and land that is too far for the bears to swim across and bears are drowning when they try. The impact on polar bears is especially evident in the southern portions of their range where the loss of ice is most pronounced. In Hudson's Bay, where polar bears are thinner and have fewer cubs than they used to. This is because they now must spend more time on land where they have little to eat and less time doing what they do best—hunting for seals on the ice—because there is less ice.

Eskimos report that the treeline is advancing northward across the tundra and that birds they don't have names for in their language, like robins, are now common. Last year a hunter even shot a bear that was a cross between a polar bear and a grizzly—a new creature on this earth created because polar bears are stuck on shore for longer periods and now interact more often with grizzlies in the far north. Scientists validate the Eskimos' observations that ecological changes are occurring with data showing that the permafrost is much less thick than it used to be.

We will see the impacts of climate change most dramatically and earlier in the arctic than here in Montana but we are already seeing it here as well with less snowpack, less flow in the rivers, warmer rivers that stress trout and other fish, more forest fires, and an extended period of drought in eastern parts of the state. Climatologists tell us that the glaciers will be gone from Glacier National Park in a few decades. Some species of birds are breeding earlier now and their young are being produced at a time that no longer synchronizes with the emergence of the insect prey on which their young depend. The alpine meadows are shrinking as forest creep upwards dooming creatures like pikas and alpine marmots now. In the near future it will likely threaten other high elevation species like mountain goats.

Scientists broadly agree that climate change is occurring and that human-generated greenhouse gases are a major factor in causing the earth to warm. There are a few scientists who disagree but except for those paid by oil companies to quibble over details.

Documenting what is happening is easier than identifying effective strategies to fix the problem. It is clear, however, that ignoring the problem is not an effective strategy and that addressing the problem of global warming will require commitment at many scales from the individual and family, to local, state, national and international governments. SJR 20 is a worthwhile effort to encourage action and the federal scale and merits your support along with several other bills that address the issue at the state scale. Some Montana cities and many individuals are taking actions on personal and local scales. All these efforts are necessary. Some efforts will be painful but opportunities also exist for Montana and the United States to benefit from being ahead of the curve on addressing these problems.

It is important that addressing climate change not become a partisan issue. Regardless of what political party we belong to, we all have children and grandchildren who will have to live in the world we leave them. I'd like my grandchildren to live in a Montana that I'd recognize.